# *3 Things Massage Can Help You With Right Now*

***Note the places in red where you can link to your scheduling info***

We know massage will make us move better and feel happier, but not everyone can make time for regular appointments. Luckily massage is great preventive care *and* it can have some instantly-gratifying results. Check out these 3 things massage can help you with *right now.*

**Headaches**

Tension [headaches](http://www.webmd.com/migraines-headaches/guide/tension-headaches) (often called stress headaches) are the most common type of headaches among adults.

Pain or pressure in your forehead or on the top or sides of your head? Could be a tension headache. It's especially likely if you've been hunching over a desk or some knitting, spent a ton of time in a car, or if you're still shivering and huddling to keep warm as spring slowly creeps in.

Massage can help get rid of that headache and regular massage may well keep it from coming back. (If you want to geek out about tension headaches and try a few self-massage techniques, check out [this article](https://www.painscience.com/articles/spot-01-suboccipitals.php).)

**Low Back Pain**

A [major research study](http://www.webmd.com/back-pain/news/20110705/study-massage-helps-treat-low-back-pain) was published in 2011 showing that massage therapy was better than drugs and usual care for general lower back pain. Better than drugs. I just had to say that twice.

Just about everyone will experience low back pain at some point in their life. If it happens to you, don't suffer. ***Schedule a massage*** and get back into action.

**Irritability**

Have you ever been so cranky you got on your own nerves? Yeah, me, too. It isn’t fun. When you feel yourself biting everyone’s head off when they ask you a question, it might be time for some self-care.

Massage is great for stress relief. You get to shut off all the things that buzz and chime and aggravate you to the point of eye twitches. Music, silence, warmth, massage. All the cranky disappears.

This is dual purpose. You'll feel better and all the people around you will be happier that you're back to your sunny self.

Got a headache, low back pain, or a case of the grumpies? ***Get a massage scheduled*** and we’ll handle that fast.

**Why Your Hands (and Forearms) Need Massage**

Gripping a steering wheel. Working a trackpad or mouse. Hovering over keyboards. And stoves. And laundry. You get it.

We put our hands and forearms through an awful lot of stress every day. Squeezing and clenching and buckling and writing. All of it. And yet, when I start to massage a hand and forearm, I often hear, “Oh! I had no idea my arms were so sore!” It’s a common surprise, but not really a surprise.

They get sore. And when they get really overworked, we end up with carpal tunnel, tendonitis, trigger finger and a whole host of other issues.

The upside here: it’s pretty easy to massage your own hands and forearms. Here’s how:

Start at the top. Using the opposite hand, gently squeeze the meaty, fleshy areas just below your elbow. Squeeze on the inside of your arm then on the outside. Gently is the key here, don’t be jamming your thumb in there hard and causing pain. It should feel good, and if it doesn’t, back off a bit.

If you want to get fancy, roll the wrist around and wiggle the fingers as you squeeze. Do that light squeezing all the way down to the wrist, and do this a few times, up and down the forearm to cover all the territory there.

Then move to the hand, using a light pincer grip, squeeze that meaty area at the base of your thumb. Lightly squeeze up and down all those finger bones through the palm, and up each finger. When you find a good spot, stick around it for an extra minute.

Whatever feels good to you is just fine. Then, switch hands and do it again on the other arm! Better yet, find a buddy and massage each other’s arms and hands.

If you’ve got carpal tunnel or tendonitis, or just achiness and pain that you can’t figure out, you may need even more attention to keep those issues at bay. For this, I suggest you see a massage therapist (PUT YOUR SCHEDULING INFO HERE). Yup. That’s me. I can work on those issues, and teach you some self-care techniques to practice at home, too.

**Why your feet need a massage**  
  
We usually don’t think about our feet. Until they hurt. We tend to take them for granted, but like other parts of our body they can get tired, overused, sore, and in need of some attention.

When they start to hurt it can lead to many other problems.

When your feet hurt you don’t want to do much of anything. You just want to stay off of them. Your body likes to move, though. And your brain functions better when you are active. So foot pain can quickly lead to other issues.

Foot pain can cause other pain in your body. If your foot hurts, you change the way you stand, walk, and move. Those changes affect your legs. When your legs hurt, you make more changes in what you do, which affects your hips, then your back, then your neck.

Some jobs involve being on your feet most of the day. Often it is on hard floors or rough terrain. You may have a long walk from the parking lot to your job.

At home we walk around to take care of our place, our family, and our belongings. We shop, stand chatting with a friend, stand in lines, and walk around doing errands. We cook, do laundry, clean and put things away. You may make multiple trips up and down stairs every day. Yard work and home maintenance keeps us on our feet as well.

You may kick things out of the way or stomp your feet to let out some frustration. You may do extra walking for exercise or from an inconvenience, or run to make it somewhere on time.

If you enjoy sports you use your feet to run, jump, and kick. Your feet take a real pounding since they support all your body weight along with the extra force from the exertion.

For exercise or fun activities you use your feet for yoga and fitness classes, hiking, climbing, kickboxing, and dance - and hauling all of your equipment around..

Your feet have things dropped on them and they get stepped on. You step on unexpected things such as rocks, tools, or toys (Legos!).

All of your leg joints are all affected by your feet. Joints are under pressure from muscles and bones pulling and twisting on them. Relieving foot pain allows your muscles and joints to be in their proper positions and with less pressure on them you feel better.

We squeeze our feet into uncomfortable shoes or boots. Sometimes it may be for the sake of fashion, such as high heels. Other times work footwear is uncomfortable. Sandals may be more comfortable but they may not provide the support your feet need.

Massage provides relief from Plantar Fasciitis, heel pain, and other common foot pain. Most muscles that move your foot start in your calf, so relieving foot pain can also reduce calf pain too.

Your feet do a lot for you. Give them some attention with a massage so you can keep doing what you want.

## **Why your legs need a massage**

Our legs do a lot for us. We use them all day, every day. Like other parts of our body they can get tired, overused, sore, and in need of some care.

Our legs take us where we want to go. They let us walk around to do what we need to do - even if it’s just to grab a snack from the kitchen.

Some jobs are physical and involve being on your feet a lot. If lifting and moving things are involved you use your legs to lift and haul them around. Job responsibilities can have repetitive actions than can overwork your muscles.

Other jobs are not very physical and involve a lot of sitting. Long periods of time with your legs in the same position causes your leg muscles to shorten, so when you do stand and walk your legs feel tight. Add commuting time in a vehicle and your legs may spend most of the day inactive. Try to include regular times through the day to get up and walk around if you can.

We may run to catch a bus, keep up with a child, or to get out of the rain.

At home we walk around to take care of our place, our family, and our things. We carry laundry and groceries. We shop, cook, clean and put things away. If you have stairs you will make multiple trips up and down every day.

Yard work and home maintenance such as mowing grass, gardening, and digging puts our legs to use.

If you enjoy sports you use your legs to run, jump, and kick. You pedal your bike, kick your legs to swim, and run and kick in soccer. You jump in volleyball and basketball. Depending on where you live you may surf or ski which involves a lot of leg use.

For exercise or fun activities you use your legs for yoga, pilates, or fitness classes. You use your legs for lifting weights, boxing, hiking, climbing, kickboxing, and dance.

Your hip, knee, and ankle joints are all affected by your legs. Joints are under pressure from muscles and bones pulling and twisting on them. Relieving muscle pain decreases the pressure on those joints and you feel better.

Wearing high heels can add to pain in your legs, too. The heels cause your muscles to be used in different ways since they not in their natural positions.

Hip and back pain can start in your legs. If one leg hurts you will change how you walk, stand, and even sit to keep it from hurting. That adjustment will affect your other leg. Your legs attach to your hips, which connects to your back, and as more muscles are out of normal position pain begins to develop there too.

Your legs do a lot for you. Give them some attention with a massage so you can keep doing what you want.

### Ummm.. do I have to take all my clothes off?

The short answer is “No. Absolutely not.”

But the long answer is, well, much longer. This is one of the most frequently asked questions about massage and deserves some discussion.

In massage school it was suggested we say to clients, “Undress to your level of comfort.” I found that’s way too vague, and doesn’t really answer the questions. Heck, I’m not even sure what that means.

*{Depending on your script with clients, this part should be changed or removed} At some point I switched to, “I’ll leave the room so you can undress, there’s a hook behind you for your clothes. Bottom undergarment on or off, however you’re most comfortable is just fine.” That’s been working okay, but sometimes I feel more of an explanation would be useful.*

First, no matter what, you’ll always be covered (draped) with a sheet and a blanket. You’ll never be left feeling exposed or chilly. When I work on an arm, I fold the sheet back and tuck it under your arm so it’s secure. (No drafts, my friends.) I follow the same protocol for the leg.

When I work on the full back, I fold the drape down at the hips. If you’re wearing underwear I’ll gently tuck the sheet around the waistband, to protect your clothes from massage oil. If you’re wearing a bra, I’ll work around it. If you’re wearing a t-shirt or tank top or space suit, I’ll work through it. I know plenty of very effective massage techniques that can be administered over clothing. If I feel I can’t effectively treat your issue through the clothing you’ve chosen to wear, I’ll tell you, and we’ll figure out another approach.

I don’t care, and I’m not judging you. This massage is about you and it’s important you feel comfortable. For some people that means leaving some clothing on. For others, it means taking it all off. There is no right or wrong, this is your massage.

Enjoy your next massage!

## How to give a fantastic massage

Everyone wants a massage, but sometimes making it in to see your favorite massage therapist (hi there!) just isn’t feasible. It’s in those unexpected and inconvenient moments that knowing how to give your partner a pretty great massage yourself can make the difference between a rotten day and a better one. But of course, this hinges on one thing: *do* you know how to give a good massage? Giving an at-home massage is not that hard. Here are my favorite tips:

### Use firm pressure, but not hard.

People get confused about pressure in two opposite ways. If your partner is smaller than you, you may have a tendency to use very light pressure. This is okay to a point (you probably won’t hurt anyone), but can be a little frustrating if your partner is tense or sore or, even worse, ticklish. On the other side are the people who come from the “no pain, no gain” school of massage. Don’t buy into this myth! Massage should be pleasant. If your partner has to tense their muscles and clench their jaw in order to get through your ministrations, it’s not helping.

### Slooooooow doooooown.

There are absolutely occasions where someone might want a fast-paced, vigorous massage. But unless your partner is getting warmed up for a race or ballroom dancing competition, this is probably not one of them. You’re not going to miss some key muscle if you take your time. If you seem relaxed, your partner is going to relax too. So take a deep breath, put your hands out, and make each stroke last.

### If you meet a bone, leave it alone.

There is one exception to the firm pressure rule, and that is bones. You don’t need to be an anatomist to recognize the ones that stick out, like knees, elbows, ribs, and spines. With little padding between them and the skin, these areas can be quick to bruise or feel painful. If you find your hands arriving at one of these bony landmarks (yes, that’s actually what massage therapists call them, it’s like reading a topographical map), you have two options: turn around and go back the way you came, or skim over them using gentle pressure and keep going with your massage on the other side.

### Practice good body mechanics.

If massage shouldn’t be painful for your partner, it also shouldn’t be painful for *you*. If you are hunched over, if your wrists are bent at an awkward angle, if you are using your thumbs or fingers in ways they weren’t designed to work, you will end up regretting the day you ever offered to give a massage. Use bigger muscles in place of small ones whenever you can: use your back to provide pressure instead of your arms, and your arms instead of your fingers. Whenever possible, push instead of pulling. When you move to a new part of your partner’s body, adjust your entire position, not just your hand placement. It may feel strange at first, but imagine if you tried to shovel snow by standing in one place and using just your arms to move the shovel from one side of you to the other. If that image seems ridiculous, you already understand why proper body mechanics are so important.

### Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Really, you probably don’t need to talk to a massage therapist to learn that open communication between you and your partner is key to anything you undertake together. But it’s especially true in a situation like a massage, where one of you is more vulnerable than the other. As the massage giver, it’s important that you check in regularly: How does this feel? Would you like more or less pressure? Do you remember whether I turned the oven off? (Okay, maybe not that one.) The same goes for communicating your own needs. If you are getting tired, or thirsty, or really need to leave for work, say something. Don’t leave your partner feeling guilty about enjoying a massage because you made a unilateral decision to sacrifice your needs for theirs.

### Learn from the pros.

As with any skill, one of the best ways to learn to give a massage is by watching the people who are already great at it. Getting regular professional massage (hello again!) and taking a couples massage class are both helpful. Barring that, YouTube is a fantastic source of tutorials for beginners. You can search for a style you like—[Swedish massage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31hP2LqIkuo&t=96s) is a great place to start—or an area you’d like to focus on, like the [neck and shoulders](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocioXi-8TY4).

### If you follow these guidelines, you’re going to be fine.

You may not be winning any championships, but massage isn’t a competition. If you can give a caring, relaxing massage without hurting your partner or yourself, you’re way ahead of the curve on this one. And if you feel like you need more than that … well, give me a call.

## 

## 4 ways to improve your sleep

March is fun for a few reasons. Exciting basketball, green beer, and a confused body clock. Wait, that’s not fun. March is when we attempt to shake off the winter doldrums and see the light at the end of the tunnel in the form of daffodils and light sweater-weather. Daylight Savings Time robs us of a precious hour of rest we won’t see it again ‘til fall, and our sleep cycles get all out-of-whack.

But sleep issues aren’t just a seasonal problem. It’s estimated that over 60 million Americans suffer from short-term (a few days or weeks) or long-term (more than a month) insomnia. Most cases of chronic insomnia are secondary, which means they are the symptom or side effect of some other problem.

We’ve all heard the standard ‘sleep hygiene’ tips about avoiding caffeine, using room-darkening shades, and going to bed at the same time every night. Here are a few other ideas that aren’t as well known.

**Nap properly**

Taking a nap during the day can be great for productivity and fabulous for health, but you’ve got to do it right. Aim to nap for 20 to 25 minutes, any longer than that and you’ll feel groggy when you wake up and you risk not being able to fall asleep when it’s bedtime. (If you really want to get good at power naps, there’s a [whole kit](http://www.powernapkit.com/) to help you get it right.)

**Be mindful of the temperature.**

Take a warm (not hot) shower or bath about an hour before bedtime, and keep your room cool at night. The drop in body temperature signals your body to calm so you’ll fall asleep faster and sleep more deeply.

**Turn off the electronics.**

Okay, so you’ve heard this one. But it’s the most important and the least followed piece of advice.

Get an old fashioned alarm clock so you don’t need to use your phone. Turn your phone, iPad, Kindle, or whatever you’ve got off, and put the devices in another room. Yes, a whole other room. You may think that a phone on silent, hanging out on your nightstand, won’t disturb your rest, but it will. Just knowing it’s there puts your body on alert. It’s far too tempting to reach over and ‘just check a few emails’ if you do wake up in the middle of the night. Save yourself. Break this habit.

**Get a massage**

Yup. Massage can help with sleep issues. There have been [several studies](http://www.amtamassage.org/approved_position_statements/Massage-Therapy-Can-Help-Improve-Sleep.html) demonstrating the efficacy of massage in people with sleep problems, especially when treating secondary issues that may impair sleep, like back pain, pregnancy and migraines.

You can call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or schedule online here xxxxx.com and get ready for a better night’s sleep.

## Four ways to keep stress at bay

As much as we enjoy the emerging flowers and warmer weather of April, there can be a bit of a dark cloud hanging in the spring sky. Often the first few weeks of the month are a rush of receipts and 1040’s as the April 15 Tax deadline looms, and a rush of new schedules as the kids’ sports seasons fire up. Maybe that’s why April is Stress Awareness Month; to remind us to take care of ourselves, and not let stress go unchecked.

**Meditation**

Meditation does not have to be about pretzeled legs, chanting, and reaching enlightenment. It can simply be about creating a moment of stillness in your mind as a way to become more relaxed. Just one minute, [60 seconds of meditation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6eFFCi12v8), can dramatically improve your mood, your productivity and the quality of your day.

**Exercise**

It can be tough to make time for exercise when the schedule gets tight and tensions get high. But that's when it becomes even more important. Exercise can relieve the physical symptoms of stress like fatigue, pain, and moodiness. If you can't make time for daily workout, try to fit a 5-10 minute walk outside into some part of your day. A little goes a long way when you need it.

**Giggle and hum**

Both laughter and music can lower the blood pressure. In fact, [this study in 2011](http://www.cnn.com/2011/HEALTH/03/25/laughter.music.lower.blood.pressure/) showed that 3 months of laughter or music therapy resulted in the same drop in blood pressure that could be achieved with a low-salt diet, losing 10 pounds, or taking a blood-pressure-lowering medication.

So cue up the "Who's on first?" or dance around with your kids while making dinner and work some giggling and humming into your day.

**Massage**

Regular massage can improve sleep, relieve headaches, reduce muscle pain, and improve moods. Plus, massage feels good. When you feel good, you play more, work more efficiently, and take better care of the people you love. Schedule a massage now to prepare for a busy (and fun) spring!

**Commit to taking care of yourself this spring! You may be surprised with the results.**

## 6 Healthy Actions You Can Do At Work

May is Global Employee Health and Fitness Month, so we are going to talk about some ways to promote the benefits of a healthy lifestyle by giving you simple actions you can do anywhere… especially at work.

**Take the stairs.**

Pedometers, Fitbits, and various health tools track steps and daily mileage. One of the first things people do when they lean into a healthier lifestyle is to increase their movement. This can take the form of an actual organized fitness plan or by incorporating little acts of action that propel them forward toward their goals; such as taking the stairs and parking a little further from the building.

**Get up.**

If you’re a desk jockey, one of the best things you can do is to get up and move. Do it every hour if you can. This action can increase blood flow as well as your productivity. A 5-10 minute break can prevent eye strain, cramped wrists and stretch a stagnant body.

**Increase your water intake.**

Hydrate. Do we really need to tell you why? Drinking water is good for you and will keep you hydrated. Benefits also include improving digestion and clearer skin. Keep a water bottle with you at all times and sip from it often. (Bonus tip: Couple drinking water with a repetitive activity can be a good way to stay on task.)

**Eat something.**

Very busy people often forget to eat. We’re not talking sugary snacks that boost your energy (and then cause a crash) throughout the day. We’re talking about healthy, good-for-you snacks that keep you feeling full and satisfied without all the calories and carbs.

**Breathe Deep.**

The workplace can be hectic at times. Finding a moment to take a deep breath can keep the most frazzled days focused and on point. By remembering to breathe will help you reduce stress and anxiety, slow your heart rate, and just feels good.

**Get a massage.**

Ok, so this one is kinda hard to do on the clock. We’ve managed to find ways around this though. Scheduling a half hour massage on your lunch break might be just the thing to keep you on task and relaxed. You could go for a full treatment off the clock OR maybe you can talk “the powers that be” into recruiting some massage therapists for some seated chair massage right there in the office.

There are so many other ways to practice healthy habits at work. From balancing poses at the copier to correcting your posture at your desk. Practicing healthy habits in the workplace is tricky. Find ways to work them in and before long you won’t even notice the extra tasks that are bringing you one step closer to a healthier you!

## Simple Steps to Prevent and Detect Melanoma/Skin Cancer

Summer is right around the corner and where there is more sun, there is often more skin exposure. May is Melanoma/Skin Cancer Detection and Prevention Month and we are going to look at some ways you can prevent and detect skin cancer.

**PREVENT**

**Cover up with clothes and sunscreen.**

As a rule of thumb, cover up as much as possible. Be sure to wear a broad-brimmed hat and UV blocking sunglasses. Use broad spectrum (UVA/B) sunblock with SPF 15 or higher every day. If you’ll be active outdoors, opt for a water-resistant, UVA or UVB sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. (Sunscreens should be used on babies over six months of age.)

**Avoid harsh sun and tanning.**

Avoid getting a sunburned at all costs. Skip the tanning and never use UV tanning beds. The sun is strongest between 10AM and 4PM, so try to avoid the sun during these hours and find some shade. Make sure to keep newborns out of the sun.

**DETECT**

**Perform a head-to-toe self exam.**

The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends everyone practices a [self examination every month](https://www.aad.org/public/spot-skin-cancer/learn-about-skin-cancer/detect). Skin cancers found and removed early are, more often than not, curable. You may find having a doctor perform the initial examination will help assure you that any existing spots, moles or freckles are totally normal and treat any that aren’t. After that a routine self exam shouldn’t take you longer than 10 minutes.

**Get your partner involved.**

In addition to seeing your physician annually for a professional skin exam, have your partner keep an eye out for any changes in your skin. Sometimes they see parts of our bodies that we don’t see everyday (like the small of our back or behind your neck). Have a discussion about the importance of paying attention to changes in your skin and make sure you return the favor by keeping an eye on any changes on their skin.

**Get regular massages.**

First, you should know, it’s not up to your massage therapist to check you for signs of cancer, but it definitely can’t hurt having an extra set of eyes on you! When you are a receiving regular massages *[←---Insert your link here!]*, your massage therapist will become familiar with your body and all the little markings that go with it. Sometimes, a massage therapist is a first line of defence since they will notice if a birthmark, freckle, or mole has changed size or shape.

Prevention is only half the battle. And hopefully it’s the only battle you will ever face. If you should happen to find yourself in a different battle, the early detection of skin cancer is paramount. The sooner you catch it, **the better your chances are of beating it.**

Enjoy your summer, but remember to protect yourself from the sun and bring ANYTHING suspicious to your doctor immediately.

## Happy Mothers Day!

Whether you are a mother, have a mother, or know a mother, Mothers Day is time to honor those who've played this important role. Stepmothers, birthmothers, and godmothers too. While there are as many ways of being a mother as there are moms in the world, one thing is certain: it's a tough job, but a rewarding one. Here are just three ways massage might be of service to the mothers in your life.

**Expecting Mothers**

Prenatal massage is a growing field, as training programs for massage therapists increase and old myths about massage during pregnancy fade. Massage can ease the aches and pains associated with increased weight, loosened ligaments, and shifts in center of gravity. There are all kinds of cushions and props that can help pregnant women relax comfortably on a massage table, no matter what their dimensions. Contrary to the old tale, massaging the feet, ankles, back, or even stomach will not cause miscarriage when done appropriately.

Of course, massage therapy, while helpful, isn't a cure-all. Massage can't stop that nosy neighbor from touching your belly every time she stops by, or cravings for hot Cheetos and root beer at 2:00 AM. But it can alleviate some of the symptoms that naturally come with growing a new human being, leaving expectant mothers more free to focus on the hope and joy that make pregnancy such a fabulous stage of life.

**Adoptive and Foster Mothers**

Biological mothers typically get a nine-month period to prepare for parenthood. Foster and adoptive mothers might wait and wait for news … then find themselves parents of a tot or teen virtually overnight. Plenty of mothers juggle soccer practice with homework, but fewer have to add court dates and social worker visits to the mix. Not only can these realities place unusual stress on foster and adoptive moms, their uncommon nature means that it can also be harder to find much-needed understanding and support.

Massage can help manage this stress, for all members of the family. Symptoms of stress, such as headaches, high blood pressure, and anxiety, can all be alleviated by massage. And for children who come from backgrounds where touch was lacking (or inappropriate), pediatric massage can help them develop a healthy relationship with touch. When foster and adoptive mothers learn some of these techniques for themselves, it can also be a way for children and their new parents to bond.

**Mothers of Young Children**

Unlike pregnant mothers, who often feel like their motherhood draws too much attention to themselves, society tells mothers of young children that their role is all about their children first, second, and last. Getting up in the middle of the night to change a leaking diaper? Chasing a toddler into the street? Taking time off work to care for a kindergartener with an ear infection? No matter, it's not about you, mom. It's about your kids.

It's true, to a point. Who wouldn't make sacrifices for their children? But one factor that can contribute to a healthy, happy childhood is a healthy, happy mother, and every person deserves to take steps towards their own well being, mothers too!

Massage therapy can help the body rest and recuperate from the effects of a busy schedule, interrupted sleep, and the physical strain of lifting and interacting with growing children. It also provides precious time for moms to focus on their own needs, apart from the responsibilities of mothering. And for those mothers who find themselves dealing with the very real condition of postpartum depression, massage may also play a role (although far from the only one) in an appropriate treatment plan.

**Moms who are not moms**

For women who don’t have children, by choice or circumstance, Mothers Day can be melancholy. There is great joy in being a Favorite Aunt, Baby Spoiler, and Super Supporter of all her friends with children, but we don’t have specific days to celebrate those roles. Women without children don’t always get all that snuggle time with little ones that raises oxytocin, dopamine, and endorphins. Massage is a great way to get the happy chemicals pumping. If there’s a woman in your life who loves your children, or makes your job as a parent better or easier, Mothers Day is a great time to recognize her.

**There's no one way to be a mother**

Despite what the sensationalist headlines about the Mommy Wars would have us believe, and there's no one way to take care of your health and wellness. Whether the mother you're thinking of needs a sports massage after her next marathon or a deeply relaxing hour so she can doze, it's all worthwhile. So this Mothers Day, let's do all our moms a favor and call a ceasefire, honoring them in whatever ways make sense for their own lives.

Get your favorite mom(s) a massage gift certificate here  **{<<-- put your link here}.** It’s easy, fast, and a gift she’ll love!

And to the mothers out there reading this, on Mothers Day and every day … here's to you.

## Stop headaches before they start

June is Migraine and Headache Awareness Month and we are going to jump right in and look at some ways to stop the pain before it starts. Are you ready? Let’s go.

**Avoid triggers**

If certain foods or scents have triggered headaches in the past, it could be time to make a note of them and avoid them at all costs. Things like caffeine, cigarette smoke, and bright lights can be a big culprit in spurring on pain, but it doesn’t have to be that obvious. Perfumes, loud noises, flowers, and even lunch meat have the power to make you miserable.

**Workout often**

Exercising on a regular basis reduces tension and can help prevent headaches. Choose something you enjoy doing - walking, biking, kayaking, hiking, etc. - and follow the proper guidelines for the exercise you’re engaging in. That means stretching and warming up slowly. And don’t forget proper hydration.

**Bonus:** It is also said that obesity can be a factor in triggering migraines, so exercise can help you maintain a healthy weight or lose excess pounds.

**Eat and sleep regularly**

Lack of sleep and skipping meals can aggravate symptoms for the migraine sufferer. Make sure you are getting enough fluids and are eating meals at regular times. Lack of sleep (or even getting too much sleep) will also aggravate symptoms, so implement routine and stick to it.

**Control stress**

Stress. Stress. Stress. It happens. Sometimes it’s hard to avoid. The only thing we can change is our response to it. Learn techniques to reduce stress levels like breathing, yoga and meditation. You can also combat stress with a massage *[<---- INSERT LINK HERE]*, a long walk, a hot shower, or whatever you need to do to take the edge off.

According to the Migraine Research Foundation, nearly 36 million Americans suffer from migraine headaches. Acknowledging the triggers and patterns surrounding your migraine episodes will help you figure out what’s causing them and minimize your chances of experiencing headache pain.

## The Reboot for your Mind and Body

Do you feel stretched in a hundred different directions?

Obligations, deadlines, appointments, meetings, work, housework, sports, everything. More often than not, it seems there aren’t enough hours in the day or days in the week for all that needs to be done. We’re on constant high alert. We're always moving.

All this chaos can be hard on your body and mind.

When this happens, we tend to be less mindful of our eating. Or chasing sleep like it’s a lively kitten. Or we get snippy with loved ones and coworkers.

The effects of this day to day stress are cumulative for most of us. Stiff joints get stiffer. Cranky shoulders get crankier, then one rogue golf swing or one heavy laundry basket makes it worse.

Massage is the mini-vacation you probably need.

Without the sand in your shoes and having to pull your computer out of your backpack.

Massage therapy is a reboot. It’s the control-alt-delete for your body and mind.

A massage resets your thoughts, slows your pulse, regulates your breathing, and recharges your mind.

Spend some time on my massage table, taking care of you. You can schedule online right here, <<LINK>> or call me at 555-555-5555 to make your appointment.

## 5 Tips for Neck and Shoulder Care Between Massage Appointments

People with neck and shoulder issues often have their pain return before their next massage appointment. Work, play and children all make demands on the body. A dull ache can quickly turn into a burning pain especially while folding laundry, doing yard work, playing on the computer or any of the other million things you do.  
  
What can you do between professional massage appointments to take the edge off neck and shoulder pain? Here are some ideas.  
  
**Take a Break**

Take short breaks as often as you can if you sit at a computer all day. Move your shoulders around and s-t-r-e-t-c-h. Ideally you can get up and move around a bit. But even if you're chained to the desk, you can rock out a little [Deskercise](http://www.healthline.com/health-slideshow/deskercise#1) to stay loose.

**Get the kids into it**

Have a short yoga break together! There are [plenty of videos](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CITc2AxYnPY) made especially for kids, and the moves are just as beneficial for adults. Bonus: got a little one averse to naptime? Try the [lying-down postures here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5AXVQ9OyMo) and maybe you'll get a short break.

**Heat it**

Just 10-15 minutes of heat on your shoulders can make a huge difference in how your tissue moves and feels. You don't need a fancy heating pad, you can [DIY that](http://www.healthline.com/health/pain-relief/how-to-make-a-homemade-heating-pad#3).

**Self-massage**

Try it, you might be surprised how much it helps! It's not complicated, just grab a tennis ball or a red rubber ball and [check out these techniques](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUNFiLWX_yQ).

**Choose the right pillow**

You spend about a third of your time in bed, be sure it's cozy for your neck. Side-sleepers have different needs than belly-sleepers. The [right pillow at night](http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/features/snuggle-up-with-the-perfect-pillow) can help you all day.

**A few minutes of self care every day, little changes, can make a huge difference in how you feel. See you at your next appointment!**

## 5 Things You Didn’t Know About Juvenile Arthritis

Arthritis isn’t just one disorder. It’s a complicated set of musculoskeletal disorders made up from over 100 different diseases or conditions that destroy joints, bones, muscles, cartilage and other connective tissues. The symptoms cause pain, limit movement, and can halt an otherwise active person’s life.

In the US, almost 300,000 of those affected by arthritis are kids. Juvenile arthritis (JA) is a broad way to describe a variety of autoimmune and inflammatory conditions that can develop in children ages 16 and younger. We don’t know yet why it strikes, and it can appear in many different ways.

July is Juvenile Arthritis Awareness month, and I’m taking this opportunity to learn more and share more about JA. Here are five things I didn’t know, and I bet you don’t know them either.

Children Can Be Diagnosed With Arthritis

When we hear the word arthritis we often think of adults with stiff joints, not children and teenagers. Stiff joints, pain, and swelling for more than 6 weeks are associated with arthritis. Eyes, skin, and the gastrointestinal tract can also be affected in children. It is an autoimmune disorder, meaning the body is attacking itself instead of a foreign body such as a virus. If your child or teen seems to always have a tummy ache and complains of joint pain it could be a good idea to visit your doctor for a chat.

There is No Known Cause

Parents of children with a JA diagnosis will ask the question, “What caused this?” Unfortunately the answer is usually, “We don’t know for sure.” Researchers are looking at genetic and environmental factors which may contribute to the development of JA, but they have found no specific cause. There isn’t one single blood test to diagnose. Studies are trying to determine if siblings of children with JA will also develop symptoms.

Common Signs of Juvenile Arthritis

Complaints of painful knees, hands, feet, neck, or jaw common symptoms. This pain is common first thing in the morning or upon waking from naps. Arthritis pain tends to appear slowly, not suddenly like an injury.

Stiffness in the joints is another sign of arthritis. Usually the stiffness will be worse in the morning but improve with movement throughout the day. Some children may stop doing certain things. Has your toddler stopped using utensils to eat when he has been wielding a fork for months? See if you can determine if he’s in pain or just exploring with his fingers.

Swelling of a joint or joints is a strong sign a child might need an evaluation. The joint may be hot to the touch, as well. Often a child with JA will develop fevers with fatigue but no other symptoms of illness.

Treatments for Juvenile Arthritis

Even though there is no cure for JA, doctors will have a treatment plan for each patient. Treatments may include medication, physical therapy, nutrition, and eye care. One patient may respond well with medication while others may do better with movement or physical therapy. The whole family will work together in an effort to maintain normalcy for the patient. Adjustments to schedules may happen, but there’s no need to quit living life altogether.

Massage as a Treatment

We all know massage feels great on sore muscles, but can it help with the stiffness of arthritis? Maybe! We know massage can have a positive effect on blood pressure and anxiety. A study at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey looked at people with osteoarthritis of the knee. The people who received a Swedish (or relaxation) massage twice a week for 8 weeks reported improvement in pain levels and function.

Massage for children and teens can be beneficial in many ways. Regular massage helps manage painful symptoms and can help improve self-awareness, self-image, and self-confidence. Parents can even work with a massage therapist to learn soothing techniques to apply at home. Massage for arthritis is usually gentle and soothing with a warm touch, perfect for use by any parent trying to help his or her child. If you have any questions or would like to schedule a massage for your child (or yourself!) you can always contact me ***<<<link to contact or scheduling page here>>.***

With this list of signs you may learn how to spot the signs of something more serious than a case of the childhood “I don’t want-tos.” Chronic pain is no fun, but it can be harder to deal with if no one knows it’s happening. Juvenile arthritis is a real issue with real symptoms. If spotted and treated early, it doesn’t have to mean an end to the active life your child deserves.

11 Ways to Treat Yourself (That don’t involve money or food)

It’s not hard to think up great ways to treat yourself. We’d all love a spa day topped off with a meal prepared and served by someone else. Maybe a sitter for the night, so the little angels are asleep when we get home. Or just a morning where the cat doesn't wake you up by sitting on your windpipe.   
  
But for every article I see about self care, I roll my eyes at least 12 times and think "Who can afford that?" And sure, I would love to have an afternoon to myself and a bucket of fried chicken, and a cookie dough chaser. But that's not particularly healthy.   
  
So I'm a fan of realistic self care. That is, activities that aren't expensive, don't involve food, and will make you feel good about how you spent that time. Here's a list of my favorites  
  
**Meditate, the easy way**  
If you're the kind of person who can't sleep during the day, napping can be more like torture. But guided meditation is a whole other story. It gives your mind something (easy) to do so the rest of you can relax a bit. There are plenty of free guided meditations online, my favorites are at the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center website. http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22  
 **Walk and a picnic**  
Okay, this one involves food, or just a beverage. Pack a little bag with a snack and a drink and go for a walk. Doesn't need to be far, doesn't need to be fancy. Just get outside, find a rock or a glade or a bench, settle in and sip your beverage. Listen to the quiet, or people-watch. Even better, bring a little trash bag and pick up litter along your route. You've just added in a random act of kindness to your personal time. Go, you!  
  
**Read a book**  
When was the last time you read for pleasure. Even if you can't get to your library, there are plenty of Free ebooks on Amazon http://ow.ly/T6FV302tFeI, and your local library probably may have a free online borrowing program. Or reread some of your favorite books from childhood if you have them hanging around.   
  
**Learn something**  
If you choose the topic right, learning is great self-care. Pick a topic for FUN. Don't feel like you need to learn something pertinent to your work or a current hobby. Check out Coursera, MIT or Harvard to start. (But there are PLENTY of sources for free online classes, do your own searching, too!) https://www.coursera.org/ http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm <https://www.extension.harvard.edu/open-learning-initiative>

**Draw**  
Bust out a piece for paper and draw something. Even if you don't have fancy pencils or crayons or markers, you can play with shading and pressure and make something cool. There are plenty of free coloring pages http://www.coloring-pages-adults.com/ you can download and print out.   
  
**Write a letter** (this one will cost you the price of a stamp)  
Remember letters? On real paper? It's becoming a lost art, which is kinda sad. it used to be so exciting to get a real letter in the mail. Not a bill, not an advertisement, but a real letter, with news, from someone you love. It was downright magical.   
  
If you feel totally lost and don't know where to start, here's a site to help you out. http://www.nhcs.net/parsley/curriculum/postal/friendlyletter.html  
  
**Geocaching!** (Pre-PokemonGo-Style)  
Geocaching is a real-world, outdoor treasure hunting game using GPS-enabled devices. There are plenty of free apps to help you learn geocaching and get started. My favorite is Geocaching.com. https://www.geocaching.com/guide/  
  
**YouTube Karaoke**  
For nearly every song out there, there's a karaoke accompaniment on YouTube. For reals. https://www.youtube.com/user/TheKARAOKEChannel Crank it up and let ‘er rip. You’re a stress-free superstar now.   
  
**Play cards**  
Get a kid and play Uno, or find an old deck of real cards and fall into a game of solitaire.   
  
**Foot bath**  
You can go nuts and find a whole bunch of fancy recipes on the internet, or just throw some salt into big bowl of warm water. Put a foot in there. Scrub it a bit with a washcloth. It feels good, the warmth is calming (or use cool water if it's a zillion degrees where you're at), and your feet will be all soft and good-smelling when you take ‘em out.   
  
Got a teabag? Throw it in. Got an essential oil you like? A few drops'll do. No big whoop.  
  
When you're ready, dry that foot off and slather with some lotion. Or coconut oil. Or olive oil. Whatever you have is just fine. (Put some socks on to really make it last, and so you don't slip, ok?)   
  
**And when all else fails: Nap**

Put your jammies on and take a nap. In your bed. Not all jammed up on the couch with the TV on. Close the shades in your bedroom and hunker down for a proper sleep.

**There. You don’t have to spend money or fill your belly to feel great and treat yourself well!**

## 3 ways teens can benefit from massage

Adolescence is a unique stage of life. In between childhood and adulthood, teens go through massive changes on both a physiological and a psychological level. Naturally, this means that teens also have unique health and wellness issues. While nothing replaces regular physical exams with a physician and an active lifestyle, massage therapy can be a valuable component of a teen’s health and wellness. Here are three different issues often occurring during adolescence that massage has been shown to help:

**1. Poor body image and eating disorders.**

According to the [National Institute of Mental Health](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2011/most-teens-with-eating-disorders-go-without-treatment.shtml), 3% of American teens suffer from an eating disorder, and the majority of them go untreated. Depression, social pressures regarding appearance, and participation in sports where leanness is valued (such as gymnastics, wrestling, and diving), are all associated with the development of eating disorders. Needless to say, high school provides ample opportunity for all of these.

Studies done at the Touch Research Institute with women who struggle with either anorexia nervosa or bulimia showed that regular massage decreased anxiety levels, increased levels of the feel-good hormone dopamine, and reduced depression scores. Participants in the study also showed better scores on the Eating Disorder Inventory, indicating better body awareness. While counseling is obviously of paramount importance, massage therapy can be a powerful adjunct to other forms of treatment for eating disorders.

**2. PMS and menstrual pain.**

What’s worse than menstrual problems? Menstrual problems when you’re a teenager. Between the irregular cycles, the inexperience with managing symptoms, and the embarrassment about getting help, adolescence can be a rough time to have a uterus. Effective treatments like hormonal birth control can have negative social connotations and require a pelvic exam to obtain, a procedure that most teen girls have yet to experience and may wish to avoid.

Massage therapy [has been shown](http://www.massagemag.com/Magazine/2001/issue91/research91.php) to help with pain, anxiety, and feelings of depression related to PMS, as well as other symptoms like water retention. Girls can also benefit from learning self-massage techniques to use when experiencing menstrual cramps on a day-to-day basis.

**3. Athletic injuries.**

While high school athletes are injured at around the same rate as professional athletes, their growing bodies mean that they’re often injured in different ways. Since bones grow before muscles and tendons do, youth are more susceptible to muscle, tendon, and growth plate injuries. Sprains, strains, growth plate injuries, repetitive motion injuries, and heat-related illness are among the most common injuries among young athletes. Boys are most likely to experience athletic injuries while playing ice hockey, rugby and soccer, while soccer, basketball and gymnastics lead to the most injuries in girls.

Sports massage has a long history, and can be especially effective when dealing with repetitive motion injuries like tennis elbow and runner’s knee. Massage therapists are now found at every kind of sporting event, from the [Olympics](http://www.massagetoday.com/mpacms/mt/article.php?id=12037) all the way down to your local 10K. Given that teen athletes can be more vulnerable to injury and overuse than their adult counterparts, it makes sense to offer them the same opportunities for healing and pain relief.

Do you know a teen who could use a massage?

## 5 facts you should know about women's health

**1. Women are more prone to certain health conditions than men.** Women are more likely to experience depression, stroke and rheumatoid arthritis. Some conditions, like osteoporosis, are directly related to women’s hormone fluctuations and smaller frames. Others, like fibromyalgia, are much more common in women, but scientists have yet to figure out why.

**2. Women do not always experience the same symptoms as men with the same conditions.** While men are more likely to experience a heart attack than women, women are more likely to die of the same heart attack. The reasons may be related to the publicized symptoms: while everyone knows about chest pressure and pain down the left arm, these are symptoms typically experienced by men. Women may experience dizziness, lightheadedness, or fatigue. Knowing the different ways conditions manifest in men and women can truly be a lifesaver.

**3. Women have different risk factors than men.** Remember that bit about women being more susceptible to stroke? In addition to the risk factors shared with men, there are also many women-specific risks, including being pregnant, taking hormonal birth control pills, using hormone replacement therapy, and experiencing frequent migraines. Unfortunately, these additional risk factors don’t always show up in educational materials.

**4. Women and men sometimes react differently to drugs and other treatments.** Women wake up faster from anesthesia. Some drugs, like ibuprofen, seem to be more effective in men than women, while others like erythromycin (an antibiotic) work better in women. And of course there are medications typically prescribed for sex-specific issues that can interfere with each other. As an example, acetaminophen (AKA Tylenol) can interfere with the effectiveness of birth control.

**5. In spite of all this, women’s and men’s bodies are more similar than they are different.** We share 99% of our genetic material with every other person on the planet. We have the same basic structure, suffer from most of the same illnesses, and heal in the same way. A healthy diet, active lifestyle, adequate sleep, and positive attitude are beneficial to men and women alike. There are no studies showing whether massage therapy is better for any one subset of people than others. Maybe that research will be done in the future. In the meantime, if you’d like to know whether it works for you, there’s only one way to find out!

## How to Support Families Dealing with Cancer

Families are in the trenches fighting cancer every day. If cancer hasn’t crossed your path, whether directly or through a loved one, consider yourself lucky. It’s easy to feel helpless when friends and people close to you are struggling. Since September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, we’re going to give you some simple things you can do to help those who are facing the dreaded “C” word.

**Do. Don’t ask.**

It’s easy to say, “let me know if you need anything.” What the family needs is someone to say, “hey, I’m making you dinner.” Or “I’m babysitting - just tell me what day (or night).” Don’t give them the burden of asking. Just offer it.

**Gift cards go a long way.**

Treatments can sometimes take a patient and family far from home. Do a little research and purchase gift cards for restaurants, hotel chains and gas stations near the hospital they are using. A gift subscription to Amazon Prime or Netflix may be helpful to someone who is bedridden. Some downtime and low key entertainment might be just what they need. And, of course, a massage gift certificate *[INSERT YOUR LINK HERE]*  is a perfect way to care for the care givers.

**Remember the siblings.**

Cancer affects the entire family. Siblings often are trying to navigate many emotions like fear and jealousy. Commit to a sibling and offer to be there for them. Be a friend. Be someone they can lean on and talk to. If you send the cancer patient a gift, make sure you give them someone of equal to the sibling and include them.

**Show up.**

Shortly after diagnosis, a family will receive calls, cards, and meals. Anything to help soothe the heartbreaking news. After time, these things fade away and the family is still traveling the long road. It could be months or even years. It’s a financial and emotional weight. Keep them in mind and reach out well after the dust settles.

It’s hard to know what to say to a family that’s struggling with cancer. But don’t disappear. Meet them where they are. Sometimes there are no words. Just be present. Reach out and enlist the help of others to send cards, letters and other nice/silly/fun things that will brighten the family’s day. Even an “I’ve been thinking of you” text speaks volumes.

These tips might not seem like much, but it can mean the world to a family facing cancer. Long days and sleepless nights can be an endless cycle. Little gestures of kindness can bring the family loads comfort.

## Improve your health with breath

Breath. Such a simple thing. It’s essential to life, but yet how often do we think about it? It ebbs and flows throughout our days and we barely give it a second thought. September is Healthy Lung Month and we’re going to look at some ways our breath improves our health - including some techniques you can utilize today.

**Deep breathing can reduce anxiety**

Implementing a deep breathing technique when anxiety strikes can make the difference between a full on attack and an unwelcome blip in your day. Deep breathing lowers your heart rate, improves circulation and promotes clearer thinking.

**You can use your breath to calm down**

Let’s face it, when tempers flair it seems almost impossible to think about anything other than the current situation that set you off. Practicing simple breathing techniques can encourage calmness and help reverse the physical symptoms of anger.

TECHNIQUE for Anxiety and Calm

* Isolate yourself from everyone for 15 minutes
* Inhale slowly for the count of 4
* Exhale slowly for the count of 8
* Notice the space in between the inhalation and exhalation
* Repeat until you begin to calm down

**Take breathing even deeper with pranayama**

Pranayama is the practice of using the breath to soothe an active mind. If practiced right, pranayama can bring harmony between mind, body and spirit. It boosts your ability to be mentally and spiritually strong. There are very specific breathwork techniques that are outside the scope of this article, but we recommend [reading up](https://www.curejoy.com/content/4-breathing-exercises-for-beginners-anytime-anywhere/) and finding a good teacher.

**Use with meditation**

Breathwork can be a fantastic addition to your mindfulness or meditation practice. It can allow us to open our hearts and our minds. It has been said that it can move stuck energy as well.

TECHNIQUE for Pranayama and Meditation

* Quiet your body and mind
* Observe your breath as it is
* Slow your breathing to a calm steady level
* Concentrate on the air that moves in and out of your lungs
* Focus on how your body feels and moves as you inhale and exhale

Much like massage *[←- insert link here]*, there is no doubt that breathing can encourage relaxation and healthy habits. It keeps the body/mind functioning and curbs stress. Your muscles naturally relax and you can go about your day a little easier.

Breathing may seem insignificant. It happens naturally, so we may not think about breathing all that much, but maybe it’s time we should.

# Massage and Anxiety

Anxiety Disorders affect about 40 million American adults in a given year. Anxiety is described as a feeling of dread, fear, or apprehension often with no clear justification. Most people experience symptoms of anxiety at one time or another, but for those with a disorder, normal daily life is often interrupted and limited.

A few common anxiety disorders are panic disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), social phobia (Social Anxiety), and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. While there are varying symptoms with each, many physiological responses overlap with the different disorders. Many people are able to function with symptoms while others are unable cope with them.

Some disorders manifest with physical symptoms like sleeping problems, shortness of breath, heart palpitations, nausea, sweating or dry mouth. Others are purely emotional, denoted by excessive, unrealistic worry, feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness. Usually, there’s a combination of physical and emotional symptoms.

**Massage may help anxiety**

The American Massage Therapy Association has adopted a [position statement](http://www.amtamassage.org/approved_position_statements/Massage-Therapy-for-Anxiety.html) based on research findings asserting that “massage therapy can assist in reducing the symptoms of anxiety.” It goes on to say that massage may reduce symptoms of anxiety in women in labor, psychiatric patients, cancer patients, patients with Generalized Anxiety Disorder, children with illnesses, and many more types of clients.

The effects of massage therapy include reduced blood pressure, slowed/regulated breathing, and a slower pulse rate. If increased heart rate and rapid breathing are symptoms of anxiety could massage therapy may have a positive effect. Simply taking time to relax and removing yourself from the busy-ness of daily life can be helpful in handling some kinds of anxiety.

Those with more complicated anxiety issues may benefit from regular massage in conjunction with talk therapy, medication, and lifestyle changes.

***<<<if you have advance training in massage for anxiety, or any particular forms of anxiety disorders, this would be a great place to talk about it! >>>***

**Ask questions**

If you are unsure about trying massage to help your anxiety, ask questions. Call me and we can talk about your experience with massage and how it may help you. Check in with your health care provider and your therapist or counselor. (Be sure to let me know if they would like more information about massage and anxiety, I can provide that!)

When you’re ready, we’ll schedule an appointment <<link here to scheduling or contact info>> and you can see firsthand how massage may help you.

### Massage & Depression

An estimated [1 in 10 adults](http://www.cdc.gov/Features/dsDepression/) in the United States suffers from some kind of depression, according to the Centers for Disease Control. That’s around the same percentage of American adults who are left-handed, and yet while handedness is seen today as a quirky curiosity (or sometimes an advantage, in the case of athletes), there is still stigma and silence surrounding depression as an illness. So let’s talk: what is depression? Why is it problematic? And is there anything that can help?

## **What is depression?**

Let’s start with what depression isn’t: a bad day, a brief period of mourning after a loss, or a pessimistic outlook on life. It consists of a period of more than two weeks of a bad mood, decreased interest in things that one normally finds enjoyable, and can also include fatigue, changes in weight, difficulty concentrating, inappropriate guilt, and even suicidal thoughts. While two weeks is the minimum length for defining depression, it can continue for months or even years.

## **Are there different kinds of depression?**

Yes. **Major depression** is an episode of depression two weeks or longer that messes with your ability to function throughout the day. People can have multiple episodes of major depression throughout their lives. **Postpartum depression** is a depressive episode that occurs after a woman has given birth. **Seasonal Affective Disorder** (aptly abbreviated SAD) is a form of depression during the winter months, when there is less sunlight. **Manic Depression** (also called bipolar disorder) involves cycles of depressive lows and manic highs. There are also mild forms of depression that do not meet all the requirements of major depression.

## **What are some of the health consequences of depression?**

Aside from just feeling like crap on an emotional level (entirely bad enough on its own), depression can also have other serious effects on a person’s health. People who suffer from depression are more likely to engage in negative habits such as smoking and excessive drinking. They are also less likely to get sufficient exercises, and are more likely to stop the physical activities they used to participate in. Depression can disturb sleep schedules and also negatively affect one’s professional and personal relationships, resulting in more stress, which leads to its own host of health issues. It’s a truly nasty cycle.

## **So why aren’t we all talking about this?**

Mental illness has always been something of a taboo subject. Those with more severe problems are seen as crazy and unstable, while those with more mild issues can be accused of making it up for attention, or using the term as an excuse for ordinary laziness. Depression isn’t sexy like breast cancer (boobies!) or have the sorts of clear paths to prevention that lend themselves to awareness campaigns, like HIV. And so we’re left without the sorts of public conversations that in turn become private ones between friends. It’s easy to ask a friend if she’s taking painkillers for her broken leg. Asking her if she’s considered antidepressants? Not so much

## **Is there anything that helps with depression?**

Absolutely, and the first step is diagnosis. (Sorry, looking up your symptoms on Google doesn’t count.) A physician will be able to speak intelligently about options like therapy, medication, and other treatments and lifestyle changes.

Oh, and you might also want to get a massage.

## **Massage for depression? Really?**

Absolutely. Massage has been found to [reduce depression and improve mood](http://www.amtamassage.org/approved_position_statements/Massage-Can-Reduce-Symptoms-of-Depression.html) in people of all stripes, from children with HIV, to adolescents with psychiatric disorders, to hospice patients. Why does this work? Well, that’s still being researched. The what is often much easier than the why. But caring touch does seem to have a real effect on mood, whether it’s from a loved one, a massage therapist, or a favorite pet.

Of course, if you’re a regular recipient of massage, you can judge for yourself: is your mood improved after a massage? And if you haven’t received a massage lately (or ever!), this is a great opportunity. Do it for science! Or, do it for yourself. Because everyone deserves to feel better, including you.

## 13 Things You Didn't Know About Massage

Only 32% of [adult Americans got a massage](https://www.amtamassage.org/infocenter/economic_industry-fact-sheet.html) in the past 5 years. And only even fewer get massage regularly. So it's not surprising that most people don't know much about massage.

Here are some fun facts to build your knowledge:

Massage can help you [sleep better](https://sleep.org/articles/can-massage-help-you-sleep/). (Even if you don't nap during the actual massage.)

When your back hurts, that might not be the only area that needs massage. Sometimes back pain comes from the hip, legs or even the abdomen.

Likewise, sometimes hand and arm pain is caused by dysfunction in the neck and shoulder. The body is so crazy and weird and neat-o!

You can stop a massage session at any time. You never cede control of your body. At any time during a massage you can say "no", "stop", or even "can you just work on my neck for the rest of the time and skip everything else?" If you are uncomfortable or feel like the therapist isn't hearing your feedback, or if you just feel like the table is too hard and you have to pee and gosh, this is awful. You can end it.

Massage can help your mood. It's been shown to be helpful in treating both [anxiety](https://www.amtamassage.org/approved_position_statements/Massage-Therapy-for-Anxiety.html) and [depression](https://www.amtamassage.org/approved_position_statements/Massage-Can-Reduce-Symptoms-of-Depression.html).

Even small therapists can provide deeeeep pressure. It's not about size, it's about the techniques we use!

Massage [doesn't 'detoxify' your body](https://www.painscience.com/articles/does-massage-work.php#sec_lactic_acid). That whole thing is a silly myth. It was taught in many schools and you may have heard me say it, back before I knew better. But we know now that it's just not true.

Massage is [safe in the first trimester of pregnancy](http://www.massagetoday.com/mpacms/mt/article.php?id=13354) (unless there are unusual health issues). Some practitioners choose to not do it, but that's a liability choice.

Deep tissue massage, or any massage, doesn't need to be painful to be effective. For reals. Run screaming from any practitioner who insists there needs to be pain in a treatment.

Scars are [living tissue that can be transformed](http://www.massagetoday.com/mpacms/mt/article.php?id=14020) with massage and other manual therapies, no matter how old they are. And they can be affecting you in places farther away from the visible scar than you'd ever suspect.

It's OK to focus on certain areas of discomfort and not always get a full body session. If you only want your arms massaged, that's fine, too.

Your massage therapist loves feedback. We like to know if you hate having your feet touched, and if you looove having your ears massaged. We like knowing your musical preference and if you prefer to start face down or face up.

We're also cool if you just want to chill and let us use our judgement to design the treatment.

Do you have questions about massage? Contact me <<LINK HERE>> or ask at your next appointment <<LINK HERE>> and I would LOVE to answer them!

## Massage & HIV

We’ve come such a long way since the early ‘80s, when AIDS crashed onto the scene, killing many and frightening more. There was so little known at that time. It was through the hard work and advocacy of many people that we discovered HIV, learned how to prevent its transmission, and how to hold it in check.

Today, HIV is a chronic illness, but some of the fear still remains. There are still people working tirelessly to eliminate stigma just as there are those working to find a vaccine and a cure. Still more are working to make the lives of people living with HIV better in whatever ways they can. Some of these are massage therapists like me.

Massage therapy is not a cure. It’s not even a treatment. But it can help HIV+ individuals live happier, healthier lives:

* Massage can help alleviate peripheral neuropathy (tingling, numbness, and pain in the feet and legs), a side effect of antiretroviral therapy. Staying on a regular treatment regimen is paramount if you have HIV, so whatever makes that process easier is worthwhile.
* Massage can help with anxiety and depression, both common in HIV+ folks. Mental illness is nothing to sneeze at, and is one of the more common reasons that people find it difficult to take care of themselves.
* Massage can be a positive experience in your own body. When you have a chronic illness of any kind, it’s easy to feel at war with yourself. A massage is a time when you and your body get to be on the same team for a little while.
* Massage is a time to connect through touch. For all the good information out there about HIV/AIDS, there are still plenty of myths about how it is transmitted. This often manifests itself as a lack of everyday touch, which is especially devastating to people who have lost their intimate partners.

## **So let me state this very clearly:**

**You will never be turned away from my massage table due to your HIV status.** When you have secondary issues that mean that massage would be harmful to either you or me, I will let you know specifically what they are, so that you are not left in the dark. If you find yourself with a condition I am not trained to work with, I will do my best to find you another massage therapist who is.

**Your HIV status is private.** I will not tell your partner, your mother, your employer, your doctor, or your best friend, unless you specifically ask me to, in writing. If you would like copies of any records or notes I keep about our sessions together, you are welcome to them. But they are not for others’ eyes.

**How you contracted HIV is none of my business.** Unless it’s something that affects your health in other ways (like current drug use), it has no impact on your massage. But if you do decide to share, I will not judge you.

December 1 is [World AIDS Day](http://aids.gov/news-and-events/awareness-days/world-aids-day/). This month, whoever you are, take a little time to learn about what’s been discovered about HIV since you first heard of it all those years ago. We now know about different strains of HIV, and how our bodies react differently to each. We know how to prevent mother-to-child transmission, and how serodiscordant couples (couples in which only one partner is HIV+) can safely conceive children together. And we know that the support of friends, neighbors, family, and loved ones is one of the key factors in the health and wellbeing of people with HIV. This post is just one small action I’m taking to help everyone feel more welcome in my practice. What will yours be?

### Body image and massage

Body image. Almost everybody has something about their body that they don’t like. For many people it’s a minor issue, no big deal. But some people have a major issue with their body image. It affects how they live and their happiness.

When I tell some people that I’m a massage therapist it can cause a strong reaction. They tell me, whether verbally or through their reaction and body language, that massage is not for them. Their body image is such an issue that they don’t think anybody else can accept them.

The paradox here is that massage can really help with body image issues. In massage school we were all nervous about taking off our clothes and letting somebody else touch us. It didn’t take long for us to discover that bodies are just bodies and become much more comfortable with our own. We also experienced how good receiving a massage made us feel. Something unexpected happened – when our bodies felt better we felt better about our bodies.

I think there are three options to consider. Let’s look at the risk versus reward for them.

1. Don’t get a massage.

This is the easiest because it involves doing nothing. The risk is low since you are not letting another person see or touch you at all.

The reward is zero. You didn’t get a massage so your body doesn’t feel any better, and you still have the stress you had before.

2. You get a massage, but the massage therapist either makes note of how you look, as if it matters.

If this has happened to you, I’m sorry. You got a crappy massage therapist. That’s a bummer, and I’m really sorry. You took a risk, and even if the rest of the massage was decent, got very little reward.

This is not going to happen if you come to me. Never. No way. I can’t say this strongly enough. It goes against the very nature of who I am, how I treat people, and what I believe.

3. You get a massage. A great massage. And the therapist does nothing to make you feel uncomfortable about your body. In fact, you feel pretty good about your body after the massage.

In this option your risk is low. I don’t care how your body looks. That’s none of my business. I just want to help it feel better. Your reward is high. Again your body will feel better from the massage and you can start feeling better about it.

I have no idea how your body got to be in the condition that it’s in. You may be dealing with something that you can’t control, such as a medical condition or an injury or accident. You may be in a lot of pain or are limited in what you can do physically. Since I don’t know what caused your body to be like it is now I can’t make any judgments about you.

I’ve worked on hundreds – maybe thousands – of people. Each body is interesting and I’ve yet to come across one that I could not help.

If you have been avoiding massage because you feel uncomfortable about your body, let’s find an option that works for you. You don’t even have to explain anything to me. Leave your clothes on. Stay sitting up or face down or lying on your side or however you want. It’s up to you.

It’s my job to help you feel better. That’s it. Together let’s find a way to help you relieve your pain and stress. Don’t let your body image keep you from feeling good.